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**Barriers Present in the Culture of Special Education and Their Influence on Family Determination Development**

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# Barriers Present in the Culture of Special Education and Their Influence on Family Determination Development

by

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Report

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**Barriers Present in the Culture of Special Education**
**and Their Influence on Family Determination Development**

by

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Thirteen qualitative studies that included direct quotes of participants were reviewed and analyzed to determine the barriers present in special education culture and how the barriers influence the development of family determination and the successful transition of families and their children out of the education system. It was concluded that barriers present were conflicting definitions, mistrust of educators and families, and withholding social capital from the others. It was further concluded that the barriers influenced family determination by preventing the families from contributing to meetings and fostering professional's misinterpretations of family determination. Implications for future practice, recommendations of future research, and limitations of the meta-synthesis were included.

*Keywords:* individualized education plan, individualized transition plan, self-determination, transition, barriers, culturally and linguistically diverse, family determination

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## Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) was implemented in the United States in 1975 under the former name of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975. Congress recognized that millions of children with disabilities had educational needs that were not being met due to several reasons including lack of services and inappropriate school placements for the children with disabilities. EAHCA was renamed to IDEA during the 1990 amendments to the law. Since then, many more amendments have been made including those made in 1997 that focus on initiatives for transition services from high school to adult living (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 1997). Transition services for young adults who are transitioning from secondary education includes but is not limited to job skill training, individualized transition planning, goal setting, and job placement services.

Additional amendments to IDEA (1997) further support students. These amendments strengthen the role of parents and families while fostering relationships between them and the schools. Congress acknowledged that transition services are as equally important as fostering relationships with parents/families and supporting family involvement. Thus, the successful transition of students means families must also support the transition goals set for their children.

Between 1997 and 2004 the amendments made to IDEA received considerable praise for their conceptualization, but implementation was far from acceptable. Most notably, the development of relationships between families and schools and the setting of higher expectations for students with disabilities were lacking. From this, new amendments were again passed for IDEA in 2004. The participation of parents received more attention this time. In addition to a description of their rights as parents of a child with a disability, the importance of their participation is held in high regard. According to the U.S. Department of Education ([USDOE],

April 2009), when schools and parents are able to collaborate on behalf of the child effectively, students' learning outcomes improve, which directly influences the children's attitudes towards school, their social skills and behaviors, and the likelihood that they will take more challenging classes and pass them. Conversely, although many benefits of parental participation have been documented and stated by Congress through IDEA, parents are not required to participate. It is assumed that parents know their rights and have been provided opportunities to participate in the development of their child's education plan and future. It is entirely up to the parent to contribute to their child's educational experiences, which has resulted in troubling outcomes.

**Educational and Transition Planning**

Individualized planning for students comes in two forms – educational and transitional. It is important to distinguish between both plans for the purposes of this synthesis because the terms are often referred to in the same circumstances. However, they are separate entities within special education and require a proper explanation before moving forward.

According to the USDOE (2000), IEPs are documents that are designed specifically for the individual child; specifically, a student with a disability who qualifies for special education and related services under IDEA (2004). The underlying assumption of the requirements associated with the IEP process is that they provide opportunities for parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other professionals to work together cohesively as a team to ensure better outcomes in allocation of resources, benefits, and skill training for the student. The team must come together annually to consider the goals for the student, both past and future, in order to create the most successful path for the student. Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) can be in place before the birth of a child whom the parents already know will be born with a disability as well as within the timeframe prior to when a child with a disability enters school,

from infancy through age two. Likewise, beyond the expectation that a student with a disability who qualifies for special education and related services between the ages of three and 21 have an IEP, an IEP may need to be developed for a senior in high school who has just been diagnosed with a disability. IEPs are an essential tool for the development of every student with an identified disability under IDEA (2004) throughout their lives as they progress through the education system at both primary and secondary levels

Planning for a student to transition out of the secondary education institution can be found in the student's IEP under transition services, goals, and expectations of outcomes. Such transition planning should be tailored to each student based on the goals the student desires, the outcomes the family would like to see, and what the professionals see as appropriate outcomes for the student. As summarized by Trainor (2005) the 1997 amendments to IDEA remain broad but do include these requirements for transition planning:

i. Beginning at the age of 14, and updated annually, a statement of the child's transition service needs under the applicable components of the child's course of study (such as participation in an advanced course of study)
ii. Beginning at age 16, a statement of the needed transition services for the child, including when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages. (Section 614 (vii) (I) and (II))

According to IDEA (2004), the individual transition plan (ITP) must include a statement of needed transition services, supported employment, arrangements for independent living and community participation, and/or preparation for post-secondary education enrollment. Annual goals and 'best practices' that are most commonly found in ITPs include: appropriate vocational options, residential options, long-term support, identification of people and agencies who will

foster the development of the student once s/he leaves the education system, social skills training, money management, transportation to and from work, and an appropriate timeline for activities.

**Self-Determination**

Alongside individualized planning is the concept of self-determination for students. To date, an appropriate definition of self-determination theory has eluded researchers, who most often will employ specific characteristics and best methods from self-determination theory but not all. For the purpose of this synthesis, self-determination is defined as any or all of the following.

- Choice, decision making, and goal attainment (Trainor, 2005)
- Evaluating oneself, acting on self-evaluation, and self-regulating (Field & Hoffman, 1994)
- Active participation in the transition process (Agran, Snow, & Swaner. 1999)
- Self-disclosing strengths and weaknesses (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes. 2000)
- Knowing and requesting services and accommodations (Wehmeyer, et al. 2000)
- Physical and emotional separation from parents (Wehmeyer, et al. 2000)
- Goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior (Agran, M. et al. 1999)
- Belief that one is capable and effective of knowing and obtaining what they desire (Field, & Hoffman. 1994)

Self-determination has primarily been conceived for students who are transitioning from school to places of employment, but was not devised to address the determination of a student's home environment (Pretti-Frontczak 2000). It is just as imperative that we consider how self-

determination is recognized, understood, and implemented in the student's home. For example, families exhibit determinations of their own that represent their values, beliefs, and traditions, and it is this determination development that supports the development of self-determination in the student. It is critical to consider family determination before we consider how to encourage our students to become determined individuals because self-determination begins at home and, as supported by IDEA and previous research, parents and other family members are the strongest link to success during the IEP/ITP processes. Family determination is expressed in ways similar to the characteristics historically found in literature documenting self-determination in students. Characteristics of self-determination stated by Field and Hoffman (1994) have been used to define family determination for the purposes of this synthesis. They are as follows:

- Strong understanding of cultural values
- Speaking on behalf of their child
- Instilling beliefs, values, and traditions in their children
- Problem-solving skills
- Communicating to children what they [the family] desire for them
- Persistence
- Assume responsibility for actions and decisions
- Pride

**Previous Reviews of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Family Involvement**

In terms of individualized planning and self-determination development for both students and their families, the topic of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families comes to mind. Culturally and linguistically diverse is defined as slight to dramatic variations of life practices within identified cultural groups that do not fit the mold of the dominant culture in the

country they reside (Bergeson, Wise, Gill, & Shureen. 1999). Slight variations can include food that is eaten and daily routines. Dramatic variations can include dress, holidays observed, communication styles, and power balance in the family unit.

Historically, CLD students from CLD families have been over-identified to receive special education services, have seen racial and ethnic stereotypes being used against them, and continue to face a culturally insensitive educational system. Therefore, appropriate educational planning is something they continue to struggle to receive, thus their development of self-determination in school is compromised because it is not adequately supported. As the demographics of the United States becomes more diverse as more immigrants enter the borders of the United States, the participation of CLD families is becoming increasingly important to consider when opening discussions related to self-determination. Additionally, CLD families and their past participation has been documented across literature for decades and patterns to their involvement have emerged.

Conroy (2012) found that CLD families, including those from rural areas, encounter trust issues with the professionals and schools their children attend. Trust issues may stem from language differences, unfamiliar systems of interaction between individuals, and perceptions that the family is not valued. Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar (2010) found similar patterns of mistrust of educators and also reported that families are often viewed as too passive in the eyes of the educators. That is, educators continue to believe CLD families are too compliant to demands and are uninformed overall of school procedures and their rights as parents to students. Lastly, it was found that CLD family involvement may be predetermined by family income and the mother's employment status (Zhang & Bennett, 2003). For example, a mother who is unemployed and whose family is low in socio-economic status will be less likely to participate in IEP/ITP

meetings than an employed mother from the same socio-economic level. While this description of involvement patterns is not comprehensive, it provides researchers, educators, and parents an idea of what families continue to face, and why we must continue to document the patterns for the sake of future relationships to be built stronger.

**Previous Reviews of Barriers to CLD Family Involvement**

Considering the documented patterns for CLD familial involvement in schools, it is essential to reflect on the barriers that families have historically encountered in the school system. The patterns that have evolved over time, as stated above, can be considered barriers themselves, but more specifically they are the result of existing barriers in the educational system.

It has been found by (Jung, 2011) that parents' underlying system of values is a major barrier to the families receiving appropriate services: not due to the family's values not matching the educator's values, but due to the educator's values not matching the family's. As stated before in IDEA (2004), the parent's participation in the development of the student's IEP/ITP processes is critical for the successful outcome of said processes. Therefore, the implicit and explicit values exhibited by the families are the values that must be matched in order for meetings, goals, and plans to be carried out successfully. In this context, a successful outcome includes honoring the appropriate member/s of the family and their wishes for the child. Possibly why meetings, goals, and plans are not successful is because they do not honor the appropriate individual, instead they typically honor the student and the wishes the educators have for said student when the family and its subsequent members deserve this treatment. Educators continue to act in culturally insensitive ways, thus creating a barrier to the families obtaining resources and information.

Harry (1992) found that in addition to the cultural differences experienced by families, another major barrier parents encounter is professionals evading their responsibilities in order to maintain uninformed families. Professionals would rather allow parents to remain in the dark about processes, rights, and regulations in order to maintain a higher sense of power over the future of the child, possibly due to their misunderstanding of the family's cultural values that do not match the professional's values.

Finally, Rodriguez, Baltz, and Elbaum (2013) discussed the implications of involving CLD families during the IEP/ITP process for Latino students. It was found that frequent and varied communications with CLD families was nonexistent. This creates a damaging communication barrier that results in terms, ideas, and thoughts being misinterpreted and initiated in nonproductive ways. Terms such as transition, job placement, and independent living arrangements are culturally bound in their definitions, and if educators do not continue to communicate with families in diverse ways until a mutual understanding is met, the application of transition services will fail.

**Purpose of this Synthesis**

Based on the continuing identification of lack of CLD family involvement and the barriers that contribute to misunderstood involvement, obstacles exhibited from both families and professionals can be said to contribute to an overall failed culture of special education. Just as schools and the districts they reside in have cultures and climates, the special education departments also have cultures and climates that are determined by the values, traditions, interactions, and belief systems of those involved in the culture. Thus far, it has been documented that the culture of special education is sorely misunderstood, and it can be assumed that the culture of special education supports and reinforces the barriers that are placed on

educators and families. Little research is available to provide insight as to how the barriers encountered are expressed by both professionals and families.

Numerous questions can be asked to open the lines of discussion and to provide a deeper understanding of how to identify when one is being faced with the barriers and how to proceed with breaking through the barriers. Research questions guiding this synthesis are as follows.

1. How are barriers expressed on both sides of the continuum (i.e. family and professional)?
2. How do the barriers interfere with the development of family determination?
3. How can educators identify and address the barriers?
4. What factors are needed to break down barriers to support determination development at home?

## Method

This study systematically analyzed and synthesized qualitative published literature recommending or reporting on culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parental and/or familial participation during the transition process and simultaneously during the development of determination as a family unit. Articles reviewed were published within a 19 year span (1996 – 2015) to encompass the initial implementation of parental involvement supports (1997) and the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) to 2015. Since the reauthorization of IDEA, schools and educators are now mandated to not only involve the students' parents and other family members during the transition process, but schools must allow parents to make the final decisions regarding their children. The parents have become the most important contributors, by law, to their child's education plans, but the incorporation of such changes has been documented as dismal at best. Therefore, the time period selected for the articles in this synthesis not only addresses the reauthorization of IDEA. Articles found between 1996 and 2015 also document the lack of family involvement and the barriers that families continue to encounter.

The search for articles began with an online database search through EBSCO. Articles were found by conducting an electronic search using EBSCO Research Databases including Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and PsychInfo. Search terms included famil*, parent*, CLD, diver*, transition*, self-determination, goals, participa*, independ*, and cultur*. The asterisk symbol was utilized to ensure all forms of the selected terms were included in the search. In an effort to obtain all relevant articles concerning CLD parental participation barriers during the IEP processes, a search of all reference lists of the articles obtained through the EBSCO search was completed. Finally, journals were manually searched in which literature concerning participation barriers during the IEP process was frequently found in. The journals included in the manual

search were *American Educational Research Journal, Journal of Educational Psychology*, and *Exceptional Children*. Thirteen articles were selected for this synthesis that matched all search and inclusion criteria.

Articles included in this review met the following criteria: (a) research conducted within the United States; (b) the focus pertained to CLD family involvement, self-determination, and potential barriers faced; (c) written in English; (d) qualitative data collection in the form of interviews, surveys, and/or focus groups; (e) original quotes from data collection methods provided in the published articles; and (f) full text with references available online.

**Coding of Articles and Data Analysis**

The direct quotes provided by the articles that were selected served as data to document themes in the culture of special education and how the embedded barriers in this culture interfere with the development of familial self-determination.

Articles selected were coded though several steps. First, a Microsoft Excel sheet was developed to outline the title, authors, participant characteristics, and methods used for each article. Second, direct quotes from the text were selected based on their context and explanation of topics outline in this synthesis. Quotes were selected based on the participant role (i.e. student, parent, or professional), application to the theme of family determination development, and overall impact of culturally implications that they suggested. Third, after each quote was collected, a pre-coding system was implemented. All initial thoughts, key words, and/or interpretations of each quote were documented. Fourth, all initial thoughts were gathered and placed into groups to form themes occurring across the data set. Last, the themes that were

represented time and time again were labeled as conflicting definitions, mistrust, and withholding of social capital.

Data analysis was conducted after the initial themes were found during the coding process. All findings were determined to be warranted and transparent. According to the American Educational Research Association (2006), reports should be warranted; that is, adequate evidence should be provided to justify the results and conclusions. Reports should also be transparent; that is, reporting should be explicit in the logic of inquiry and activities that lead from the development of initial interest, topic, problem, or research question.

Keeping this in mind, data collected was analyzed by theme analysis, keywords-in-context, narrative analysis, and secondary data analysis. Analysis techniques were derived from Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins (2012) and are defined as follows:

**Theme analysis**. This technique involves a search for relationships among domains, as well as how these relationships are linked across literature and contexts. Once the themes were organized, analysis was implemented to discover how the themes were linked to each other across all articles selected.

**Keywords-in-context**. This enabled the identification of keywords and utilized the surrounding words to understand the underlying meaning of the keyword in a source and across all other sources. Keywords were repetitively found across articles and gathering surrounding information and context clues provided further insight to the implications for the keywords.

**Narrative analysis**. This analysis considers the potential stories to give meaning to research findings, and treating data as stories, enabling reviewers to reduce data to a summary.

This was utilized for all quotes and dialog obtained from the articles, and the data was considered as an individual narrative as it had been in the original articles.

**Secondary data analysis**. An analysis of pre-existing sources and artifacts was conducted after narrative analysis. The quotes and dialogs obtained were considered as secondary data to provide deeper analysis into the meanings, implications, and underpinnings of the conversations and statements that contributed to the overall findings of this synthesis.

## Overall Characteristics of the Data Set

The thirteen articles included students and families from several racial and ethnic backgrounds, a variety of methods of information gathering, and several methods of documentation of perspectives. Below are descriptions of each characteristic in numerical value.

**Participants.** The articles selected provided an abundant variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds of the participants. Seven articles included Latino Americans, four articles included African American/Caribbean Americans, two articles included Native Americans, and the remaining articles focused solely on one ethnic group: Japanese American, Chinese American, Asian Indian American, Hawaiian, Native Alaskan, and Korean Americans. Six articles included more than one race/ethnicity in their study.

The number of participants in each article ranged from two case studies to 146 participants recruited from major urban school districts that included youth with disabilities, parents, and professional participants. The average number of participants for interviews and focus groups was thirty.

**Information gathering**. Four articles incorporated interviews either on the phone or in person, three utilized focus groups, two developed surveys to mail to participants, one article was

developed by the outside observation of the researchers sitting in on IEP/ITP meetings, and three articles utilized multiple methods including focus groups, interviews, and follow up interviews after group meetings.

**Purpose.** Seven articles documented the perceptions of family members, three articles documented the perceptions of professionals, three articles documented the perceptions of students, and the remaining three were focused individually on family interviewing techniques, case studies of transition, and outside observations made by the researchers who were attending student IEP/ITP meetings.

Table 1 provides a visual representation and guide to the overall characteristics of the articles included in this synthesis and is provided at the end of the synthesis.

## Strengths of Information Gathering Techniques

Before the results from the articles selected are described, it is important to note that interviews, focus groups, and surveys each provide strengths to information gathering that were described by the original authors in several articles selected.

Focus groups allow the group to respond to broad, open ended questions developed by the researcher that then lead to more specific follow-up questions that may be spur of the moment or previously planned questions. The groups provide an environment for informal discussion among a small group of participants who are asked to express their points of interests and opinions on a particular topic about which they have life experience in (Rueda, Monzo, Gomez & Blacher. 2005. Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers 2008)

One-on-one interviews provide similar strengths as focus groups by allowing for questions to be asking a fluid manner, not fixed in a sequential order. For example, the protocol

used in the article by Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez. (2005) served as a map of the territory to be covered during the course of the interview. Follow-up interviews also provide strengths in that they allow participants an opportunity to revisit some of the topics discussed or clarify previous statements and to check the researcher's impressions with participant reactions and recollections (Trainor, A. 2005).

Finally, surveys provide the participant with complete confidentiality, the measure can be tested for reliability and validity through multiple means to ensure internal and external consistency, and they provide the participants with ample time to think of answers to open-ended questions without the oversight of an unfamiliar researcher or interviewer in their presence.

## Results

### Conflicting Definitions by Families

**Self-determination**. Families generally reported very drastic interpretations of what self-determination means for them throughout all articles reviewed. For example, Shrogen (2012) reported on the perceptions of self-determination for Hispanic mothers, and the views of the mothers provided the strongest evidence to support conflicting definitions. One mother described her thoughts of the self-determination concept as follows: "I thought self-determination was only for people that were going to live on their own, be independent, have a job, and have someone drop in every once in a while" (Shogren, 2012, p. 173).

Additionally, the definition of self-determination has been interpreted as an educational concept because ideally it has been supported in the school setting. However, Shrogen (2012) found that mothers see the development of self-determination as something that begins and stays within the boundaries of their homes. For example, one mother stated, "I believe that self-determination is a familial thing. I think it is passed down through families. We talk about how to fine tune it to each disability, why not fine tune it to each family?" (p. 178).

The overarching definition of self-determination was not the only way families expressed differing opinions of the concept. As mentioned previously, several characteristics have historically been thought of as the foundation for self-determination, specifically self-awareness, self-advocacy, and understanding of disability rights supported through law. A separate mother in the Shrogen (2012) article stated, "He [the school counselor] also said 'you need to tell her she has autism, you need to!' But we said 'that's a family decision. That is not a school decision" (p. 174).

The perceived individual values of self-determination are predicted by each family's personal conceptions of the underlying characteristics of self-determination which can also be thought of outside of the concept itself, meaning they contribute to the development of self-determination but they may mean much more or less to a family. The definitions of words in the following sections support self-determination, but may also take a life of their own in their application during the IEP/ITP processes based on how families perceive them. Thus, they are considered separate, but related, entities of self-determination development.

**Independence.** Independence is a key component to the development of self-determination, but educators and professionals alike have struggled in the application of techniques, ways of providing support, and allocation of resources individual families may benefit from in order to further develop their sense of independence. Kim, Lee, & Morningstar (2007) focused on the voices of Korean American parental expectations, hopes, and experiences concerning their children's futures. It was stated by one parent, "I think we should teach our children how to fish, no give fish to them" (p. 257). This statement is powerful in the sense that CLD families may see the educators push for independence in their child, but actually provide the child very little skill development in terms of being successful after they leave the secondary education system. Kim et al. (2007) were not the only researchers to document the differing opinions of independence in families. Shogren, (2012) reported that all mothers in the study continually returned to the importance of respecting family values regarding developing of self-awareness and independence skills, describing educators who did not respect the values of interdependence that families bring to the table. A mother was quoted as saying…"interdependence within the family helps you grow…if you have the support, that encouragement, that is your catalyst, that is what helps you become more independent" (p. 174).

Just as parents have been found to believe that educators really are not helping their children reach the goals set for them, parents may see independence in terms of interdependence, thus the independence of the child is for the greater good of the family (Shogren, 2012). The child must first learn how to think of others as a support system before they will have the appropriate skills to act independently outside of the home. If professionals are not able to grasp this, the steps they make to assist in the development of success in the school environment will be made in strife.

**Goals.** Goals are culturally bound, especially for CLD families. Self-determination is a westernized concept that supports the child as an individual who must voice their own opinion and formulate their own goals in order to be determined and set the most successful path in front of them (Trainor, 2002). The topic of collectivist and individualistic cultures is most prevalent in conversations concerning goals for families and students versus goals for school professionals (Chirkov, Ryan, & Willness. 2005). Just as parents from a collectivist culture would want their child to contribute to the family unit and the greater good of the community, the child might want to set different goals for themselves if they have been exposed to the dominant culture longer than their parents. This creates an exceptionally precarious balance that professionals must tight-rope across, if they wish to stay culturally sensitive. Unfortunately, as Shogren (2012) found, this is most always not the case. One mother stated, "When I go to the IEP meetings they get scary, you know. I say 'what do you mean she's going to be on her own? No, she's going to stay with the family" (p. 173).

Statements such as this express the difference in opinion of what goals are acceptable from the family's perspective, and it displays a lack of insight from the professional side in regards to what the family desires. Families have also been found to express ambivalence in

regards to goals set for their child because they do not identify with the goals. For example, Kim et al., 2007) examined the perceptions of first generation Korean American parents with a child with an intellectual disability, qualifying them for special education services. It was found that the parents in their study often did not identify with the goals set for their children and thus sometimes acted with ambivalence to the outcome of the goals. One parent supported the notion that parents may act in indecision by stating, "If she can get a job, that would be great; but I do not think it would happen for her" (p. 256). The parent did not identify with this goal for his/her child which may have been put in place by the child's educational professionals. Therefore, the parent expressed a non-committal perspective on a goal that educators would consider to be imperative to the child's success outside of post-secondary education, and potentially placing the family and professionals at odds with each other.

Families may also express the desire to work with the school professionals as a team rather than as a set of individuals who are in charge of the child's aspirations. For example, Kim et al. (2007) found that every parent expressed their perception of the 'special heart' that professionals who serve individuals with disabilities must have. Parents in their study held professionals accountable for being humans who genuinely care about children with disabilities and their work in the field of special education, and the salary for their profession should not be their primary reason for working in said field. Unfortunately, parents found themselves at odds with their expectations and reality. All parents explained that they were not able to collaborate effectively with educators due to the educators' lack of commitment, unresponsiveness to requests, and use of power in their role to make the final decisions. Further supported by a parent in their study… "I do not think even they did a good job for improving academic areas [for my child]. Even though I asked her [his teacher] to repeat teaching what he did not acquire in some

subject areas which was written in his IEP, she did not do it. I am so frustrated with the school and getting tired of asking them again and again" (Kim et al. 2007, p. 259).

Above all else, the family members' perspectives of how they want their child's future to play out are the most important perspective to consider. If a team does not work with the family or seek to understand what certain terms they introduce might mean for family members at home and in their community, the application of self-determination concepts may fail at school because it is not being supported or taught in an equal manner at home. Thus the discussion of professionals' definitions of the same terms spotlighted for families is important to consider and vice versa, as both sides should be heard in order to determine how to break the barriers of language used in special education.

**Conflicting Definitions by Professionals**

**Self-Determination.** Self-determination is a rather new process that educators are implementing as a best practice consideration for their students in special education. The concept has eluded a proper definition, so professionals employ self-determination training in various ways that seemingly do not cross paths with the familial training going on at the child's home. Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2005) highlight this finding by quoting a mother who expressed dissatisfaction regarding the way a teacher referred to her son:

> I've had some teachers tell me about Paul that 'Oh, I knew someone in the army that had epilepsy and he did fine, no problem…so why isn't Paul doing the work?' Right! You know I hate these types of stories, we're talking about this individual child that has this problem. (p. 9)

All too often, self-determination is an overarching concept that professionals do not tailor for each child. Without considering the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the child and his/her family, they assume every child will succeed if s/he operates and behaves within the parameters of what they, as educational professionals, consider to be self-determination. The possibility that self-determination has eluded a proper definition is why it cannot be utilized appropriately in schools, and this is why professionals may not recognize self-determination development in families and students because they do not know what to look for.

**Goals**. As defined for families, goals continue to be culturally bound in respect to how professionals view and implement them for their students. Goals deemed ideal for students will most often reflect the culture of the individual who is developing them. If a white, middle class, American woman is in charge of the IEP meeting, chances are the goals she sees as ideal for the student's future will represent the goals that she sees fit for her culture; that is, westernized goals.

> The kid expressed that…family was really important to him, and he really wanted to eventually meet a nice girl, fall in love, and get married, have kids, and move out. And it became clear to use that the family had not even thought about that. And they were just upset because they wanted the kid to understand that well, according to them, he could never do that. (Trainor, A. 2007, p. 98)

This is an example of how the westernized views of the educators can result in them becoming at-odds with the parents out of misunderstanding of what the family wants for the child. The child was expressing a desire for westernized goals, but the family was not willing to meet such goals, placing the educators on one side of the table and the family on the other.

Another view of goals for professionals is expressed as the educators attempt to appease the family when they have no true intentions of helping the student reach said goals. Kim et al. (2007) referenced parents' distaste for the way educators were following through with their promises. In their words,

> When parents asked teachers [about goals], they usually said to parents your child is almost close to his/her IEP goals. Later, in the next IEP meeting, it was found that there were no goals met, not even close to what they had said. (p. 258)

Ultimately, the definition of goals for educators remains westernized in application and end result, but the process by which the professionals are expected to help or expect the child to follow through is muddled because professionals are lacking in sufficient training and knowledge in terms of the development of a formal process by which goals for individual students and families should be created and utilized. The important of culture when placed in the context of a culturally bound term seems to have disappeared in magnitude or, may have never been held in high esteem among educational professionals.

**Independence**. As mentioned previously, independence is a key element in self-determination training for students. Just as goals are culturally bound, Dennis and Giangreco (1996) found that independence, as a cultural construct, can be interpreted differently among individuals and families.

Dennis and Giangreco (1996) found that professionals might be willing to admit decisions such as independence should be held within the child's home by a parent stating "control for important decisions remains with the family" (p. 108) but all too often educators do not support independence and consider interdependence as a sign of failure for the child. For

example, Mexican American and Asian American cultures do not place an emphasis on women in the workforce. This creates a dynamic of interdependence for the women on family members, typically males, who are earning an income to support the family. In a study conducted by Hoganson et al., 2008), educational professionals described witnessing this phenomenon with their students and their mothers and lamented the lack of role models in their female students' lives. In their thinking, "With the Latinas and Asians, I don't see women working. And so our girls have no role models" (p. 222).

Stating that the children do not have role models undervalues the role and traditional goals of individual cultures. This happens because professionals most often identify with the dominant, American culture that supports and encourages female students to contribute to the family by holding a stable job. This may not be a realistic goal for all students, further supporting the idea that terms utilized and employed in a student's IEP goals need a proper definition for which educational professionals understand the implications *and* with which the family identifies strongly for without that, the goals will not be supported at home.

**Families Withholding Social Capital from Professionals**

Plagens (2011) described social capital as the networks, associations, volunteering, trust, solidarity, sympathy, cooperation, reciprocity, belonging, norms, and relationships. Information crosses the boundaries of all aforementioned aspects of social capital just as equally and often as information is withheld. Families often maintain harmony in their familial unit by withholding important information from those around them for several reasons. Deference to professionals as those who maintain the power in the relationship, mistrust, and fear of judgment are just a few reasons why families may withhold important social information from educators. Just as monetary capital allows individuals the ability to purchase items and goods they otherwise would

not be able to without the money, social capital allows individuals to make assumptions, provide resources, and support those in need if they are provided the capital that is necessary for that context. Both educational professionals and families withhold social capital from one another, and evidence has been found in the articles synthesized for this paper to document how the withholding practices used by individuals are expressed and described by both parties.

**Deference and surrender**. In the context of this synthesis, deference is defined as parents withholding information because they see the professionals as individuals who must know what is best for their child and will do whatever it is they think they need to do to make the child successful. Parents may withhold information that is important to the process because they do not believe what they have to offer will be taken seriously or even heard. Therefore, they defer to the professionals' opinions. Geenen et al. (2005) investigated the barriers against and strategies for promoting the involvement of CLD parents in school-based transition planning. They found that a power imbalance between the parents and educators was present in all contexts studied and this imbalance was influential in parents ultimately deferring the expertise to the educators, even if they were uncomfortable doing so or did not agree with the educators' decision making. A parent who epitomized this type of thinking stated, "Some teachers write up the whole thing and just read it off you know…which is not the best way" (p. 8). Additionally, Geenen et al. (2005) recorded a parent describing that even though they were disappointed with the services available, they relinquished control to the professionals so they may choose what services to provide the students. "They [the school] know…it's very obvious what is needed, you know…and they're supposed to provide it…but they're getting around it because, you know…a loophole" (p. 8).

Parents are aware that professionals can and are willing to take over control of information. Deference may be an avenue parents select to take because they do not want to struggle in order to be heard. In their minds, "They're the experts, that's their job, you just have to trust to know what's best…but there sure are times when I'm not so sure…I just don't feel comfortable saying anything" (p. 10).

Parents may also defer to professionals because they may not have been provided adequate information; thus, they end up relinquishing their control over the goal-setting process, relegating it to educators on the IEP team, as they are the only professionals the families are aware of that can provide any support. One parent in a study conducted by Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto (2012) explained…"I'm not involved in transition planning because there is no place to go besides a sheltered workshop" (p. 284).

**Parents know their child best.** It was universally found in all articles analyzed for this synthesis that parents strongly believe they know their child better than professionals do, and have every right to believe this and act accordingly. From this, it is highly likely that parents will not take the suggestions and considerations of the professionals seriously because they do not trust the professionals know their student well enough to take their child's strengths, aspirations, and mental abilities into consideration. Ideally, parents would provide information to support their standing as experts of their child, but the lack of faith they have in the educators reinforces the parents' likelihood of withholding information because they do not trust it will make an impact on the meeting. It was found that parents often do not understand the diagnosis, referral of services, and treatment of their child in school because they perceive their child as a strong individual who is capable of many things beyond what the professionals might consider. Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, and Blacher (2005) documented the cultural models of transitioning for

Latina mothers with young adults with developmental disabilities. Various cultural traditions, beliefs, and values for transitioning were inspected to identify cultural barriers present in the Latina culture. As found by two separate parents in their study, the mothers viewed their children higher than what they believed the professionals viewed them: "But I see that my boy is more mature, that is, he doesn't represent that age [referring to previous diagnosis and mental age]" (p. 407). Parents consistently held their children to higher, more preferable standards than educators did and this caused barriers to develop. "I think they don't treat our children as serious…they're talking to a baby and I think that's hard, you know." (p. 407).

Shrogen (2012) also found a mother explaining how she perceives meetings should be based on how she values and knows her child: "[Meetings] are a waste of time. Just sit with families and we'll tell you how our kids work and how we work. Not because we are imposing our way, but because we are saving you time" (p. 178).

**Fear of judgment.** Possibly more powerful than parents recognizing their expertise of their children and deferring to the judgment of professionals because they lack faith in their perspectives being acknowledged and respected, parents withhold information out of fear for being judged. This is especially true for CLD families, immigrants that are illegally residing in the United States, and families whose matriarchal and patriarchal members do not speak English, the dominant language in American culture. Blue-Banning, Turnbull, and Pereira (2002) conducted a study documenting the visions future parents have for their children with disabilities. To provide more appropriate and accurate services for all youth, a clearer understanding of the parents' hopes and concerns is vital. Blue-Banning, et al. found that one main concern parents have is that they live in fear of judgment of their child and for the judgment they receive as a family with a child with a disability. As one parent explained, their

fear is not only localized within the schools, but also within their greater community: "…not only from professionals, there is rejection from family and friends" (p. 210). The rejection that families face in their own home and communities is the foundation that withholding information from professionals is formed in this context. After all, if family and friends do not accept a child with a disability for any reason, the family will struggle in attempts to build trust for those around them that are not as close as their immediate community.

If a family does not speak the dominant language fluently, a language barrier is created. Even if a translator is employed for the purpose of communicating for the family's behalf, the information and the underlying emphasis of the information may be lost in translation. Therefore, families have found it to be easier to not speak than to be misheard or judged. Additionally, families from diverse backgrounds might feel shame that they do not represent the dominant culture they reside in. This creates an equally profound language-based barrier because the families will be less likely to communicate in any way for fear that they will be looked down upon, judged, and not held in high esteem as supportive parents for their children. "Here [school] I can't ask [questions] because I can't speak English. I am too ashamed to ask" (Geenen et al. 2005, p. 10).

In respect to translation, communication barriers, and fear of being judged, many families express concern for the mistakes they might make during the IEP/ITP process. Actions, thoughts, and beliefs that families and professionals may perceive to be mistakes are often valid and important information educators can utilize as resources for better communication and information exchanges. Misconceptions of mistakes can and will turn into fear of judgment on the family's behalf, and mistakes may be as severe as divulging illegal immigrant status or using words that the professionals misinterpret. However, embarrassment, humility, and goals of

maintaining harmony within the group make possible mistakes perceived by the family to be more common. Ankeny, Wilkins, and Spain (2009) researched the experiences of mothers during their child's transition process. It was found that parents might worry that because they are not as knowledgeable as the educators, they will not have access to future opportunities due to their lack of information. Thus, as a parent stated, "You've got to make sure you don't close the door on someone right away because they make a mistake" (Ankeny et al. 2009, p. 32).

### Withholding Social Capital from Families

In addition to families withholding social capital from professionals, educators have similar patterns of behavior to result in their withholding of information from the families.

**Unsure how to involve families.** Educators have a complicated job: trying to reach their students, provide culturally sensitive instruction in the classroom, and create bridges to build relationships with their students' families. It seems that professionals are not only educators, but they are often expected to act as counselors, career and life coaches, and therapists for all involved. This task becomes overwhelming at times, and it was found in the articles of this synthesis that educators often lack insight on how to involve families. Trainor (2007) focused on person-centered planning in culturally distinct communities in order to provide recommendations to respond to needs and preferences of CLD families. Two professionals who were trained in person centered planning completed interviews with the researcher and it was found that professionals often did not know how to invite, incorporate, and support parental participation during the meetings as stated by one educator: "I knew parents were kind of looking for something like this [person centered planning]. They wanted to look at the bigger picture for their son or daughter's future, but how do you know that?" (Trainor. 2007, p. 96).

Professionals might also be unsure of how to react to uncomfortable situations that arise during the IEP/ITP processes, and it is possible the potential for uncomfortable situations will prevent the educators from involving families to the fullest extent. One educator described her initial fear of an uncomfortable situation and then turned it into a positive:

> So, I tell parents, expect some comments to come out in a wrong way, and try to see the positive of it…You know, one parent actually broke down in a meeting. But it was good because it actually opened the lines of communication, it was actually positive. But in the moment, I was just like 'What did I just open, Pandora's Box here?' (Trainor. 2007, p. 99).

Ultimately, an educator must acknowledge that the conversations they start with the families requires the parents and children to discuss sensitive information they would otherwise desire to keep to themselves. The reactions and situations that are presented after sensitive information is discussed can be difficult to handle if the educator is not prepared.

**Parents will not understand.** It was found that educators are more likely to leave out important information and withhold social capital from families because they assume the families will not understand nor will they grasp the importance and implications of the information being given to them. In the study completed by Geenen et al (2005) one professional explained,

> I got parents that are really concerned about their kids, but quite honestly, I don't think they understand a lot of what they are doing. I mean we try to make it as clear as possible, they get copies of the papers…but they don't get it. (p. 10)

Professionals are willing to admit the role they play in withholding information because of cultural differences between their team and the family. However, making adjustments to address this issue was not documented:

> There are a lot of families that are not educated and that aren't from this country and their culture is going to clash with the IEP committee. And, they don't know their rights, and no one bothers to tell them. (Shogren. 2012, p. 180)

**Knowledgeable parents are irritating parents.** The most striking theme that presented itself in professionals withholding capital is that educators make it difficult for families to gain important information because once parents know too much about the system, educators seemingly become threatened that their role is no longer valued as highly. This, albeit a very important part of special education culture, is a more conscious decision made by educators of the previously described methods of holding back information. It was found by Rueda et al. (2005) that parents often report on this occurring more than professionals do: "When a parent starts getting too smart and really learning the system…you know your rights and they like resent it" (p. 408). While this parent's statement does not reflect the perspective of an educator, it reflects the implications of their behavior pertaining to this barrier. If parents recognize the unwillingness of educators to respect and value the participation of the parents, information will undoubtedly cease to be exchanged. Shogren (2012) documented similar perspectives from a parent: "At first, I trusted the professionals, I wasn't supposed to challenge them, and they were used to parents being weak and uninformed. But, I got informed and things fell apart" (p. 179).

In combination with previously explained barriers such as language, differences in defining terms, and fear of judgment, there is little room left for families to find sources of support in special education contexts. Educators must continue to allow families to express

disinterest, distaste, and allow them to challenge the thoughts of professionals without being seen as difficult to work with, overbearing, or annoying

**Mistrust of Professionals**

The third and final theme that was found while analyzing quotations made by parents, educators, and students is mistrust for one another. More specifically, parents do not trust educators and educators do not trust parents. This was expressed in three different ways for both parents and professionals.

**Are they really experts?** Parents often found themselves questioning what it meant to be a professional with an education that comes with an expert title. No predetermined amount of experience, research, knowledge, or education in a specific field provided families with a sense of security so they could trust the educators their children were interacting with in school. Parents in a study conducted by Blue-Banning et al. (2002) expressed their concerns for educators accepting their children as human beings: "The acceptance of the person with disability, he is accepted as he is, as the human being he is…not a person with such and such condition" (p. 209). Although acceptance of their child as a unique individual is an ultimate goal for the parent once their son graduates from his secondary school institution, they interpret educators' words and actions reveal they are treating their child as his disability, not as an able-bodied individual.

Additionally, parents are questioning how educators commit to their jobs as individuals who are dedicated to developing and supporting students who will one day become contributing members of society. Lack of commitment in turn can make parents believe that the professionals have alternative motives to working in the industry whether it be salary, networking, or simply

the opportunity to hold a job: "I think the biggest public education problem in special education in the United States is teachers' lack of commitment to their job. They do nothing but just babysitting students with disabilities" (Kim et al. 2007, p. 258). Lack of trust in the educators to complete the job that parents expect them to be doing creates a large barrier to their willingness to participate in any development for their child and as a family unit. In the study conducted by Shogren (2012), one parent undermined the very purpose of educators by stating "Culturally, we learn to accept the opinions of the educated person. But, really what is education? Maybe we know just as much because we live it" (p. 177).

**Professionals do not see the good in the child**. Similar to parents withholding information because they understand and know their child better than any professional, parents do not trust educators to see the good in their child. This can include but is not limited to the child's strengths, physical abilities, mental abilities, understanding the child's desires, and understanding the strong culture the child comes from. What is 'good' is a culturally bound term that can act as a barrier to services, and some parents, as expressed in the research completed by Geenen et al. (2005), displayed lack of insight into the strengths and successful accomplishments their child makes during the school day because this is rarely ever communicated with the parents; for example, one parent stated, "How about calling us when out child does something good?" (Geenen et al. 2005, pg. 11). Therefore, if the educators are not communicating the accomplishments and day-to-day successes of the students to the parents, the parents will possibly begin to believe the educators do not see the good in their child, only the setbacks, infractions, and failures that need parental advising.

An important part of seeing the good in each child is the willingness to allow parents to make crucial decisions and the openness of professionals to consider the strengths of the culture

from which the student comes. Often parents feel like the educators have left them out of important decision-making processes for reasons unknown to them. They continue to express their with that they could fulfill their role as a valued team member who can speak on behalf of the child to ensure the best outcome is not only set as a goal but ultimately accomplished as follows: “I don’t want to feel like I’m on an archaeology, research dig. I want to be included in the planning and decision making process, not just told what my child will do, or where they will go” (Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto. 2012, p. 284).

A powerful statement made by a parent in the study by Ankeny et al. (2009) displayed a very real reality for parents with children with disabilities and why they continue to mistrust educators in their judgments: “The guardianship was the hardest. You spend all these years celebrating his competencies in these minor areas…then you go to a judge and have him judge your child to be incompetent” (p. 33). Moments like this can happen frequently in the education system and can lead to families no longer trusting or considering the opinions of the professionals who may only see the child as their disability and their struggles.

Professionals who serve as both educators and professionals working with law and disabilities have demonstrated to parents that while they may act with the student’s best interest at heart, they truly are not aware of what is in the student’s best interest, at least in the eyes of the child’s family since in many cases, the child’s best interest lies in the best interest of the family. Therefore, if educators do not allow for the voices of the families to be heard because they do not trust or respond to what is being stated by them, the IEP/ITP teams will fail to be cohesive.

**Lack of faith in programs.** Mistrust of the programs set forth by educators is a process that occurs over time. Several researchers found that parents resented and doubted the programs available for their children once they reached high school age. By then, parents had grown

accustomed to being let down by programs for their children and expressed their distaste quiet strongly as stated by one parent: "Our experience with the school system has been so bad that we question the sincerity of the meaningful quality of these programs" (Martinez et al. 2012, p. 284). Lack of faith in programs can also be a direct result of educators withholding social capital in the form of resource availability for the parents. Shogren (2012) found a parent describing their experience in how educators failed to provide adequate information for programs that are available for families to utilize by stating, "…people don't realize there is a buffet table they can partake in because they have only been given bread and water" (p. 178).

Similarly, Blue-Banning et al. (2002) reported on what the expected outcome for a child would be through school programs compared to what the family wanted for the child. One educator stated, "I'd like to see [child] be trained for a job skill, a meaningful job skill…they [family] don't want him working in a sheltered workshop…collecting cans to make a living or see him with a blue bucket at the corner selling newspaper" (p. 211). The definition of meaningful in this context is culturally bound. Some educators would see selling newspapers under supervision to be a successful outcome for some students, while the family might see this as mediocre or even demeaning. If a family were to be told by educators that this is a goal on the student's IEP/ITP paperwork, this could create a barrier to the delivery of services because the family did not trust the integrity of the job-skills training program.

**Mistrust of Families**

**All families are resentful and fatigued.** It was found across studies analyzed that professionals often held the attitudes of families in low esteem. Assumptions were made that the families did not want to participate, did not care to participate, and had no desire to contribute to their child's future. While this is an extremely damaging assumption to be made, it is made in

our school systems and requires further inspection in order to determine how this can be identified and rectified in the future. Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, and Powers (2008) completed a study identifying transition goals and experiences for females with disabilities and reported on view points from the female students with disabilities, their families, and the educators of the student. The authors reported an educator explaining:

> When I was talking to her mother, it was really a selling game to get her involved because [the job training] is an after-school activity. And she's like 'well, I just want her to pass high school.' Well, she [the child] is credit deficient already. There is a connection that she will be earning through this too. So, you're working on parents as well as the students. Because the mind set of parents are 'Well, she's just got to do school. She's so low she can't do anything else, and don't encourage her to do anything else right now.' (p. 226)

Instead of working with the family to identify possible goals to set in place, the educator looked down on the attitude the family was exhibiting simply because they did not agree with what s/he was stating. Geenen et al. (2005) similarly reported a professional explaining the fatigue they see in most families, and thus are likely to attribute to all families they encounter who stated, "I come into contact with a lot of parents who are just tired…they're done. It's sad though because that's [transition] when they need to step on the gas…this is really going to make a difference about what they are going to do" (p. 9).

Lastly, Trainor (2007) uncovered patterns reflective of other researcher's results. She was able to document that professionals continue to act in culturally insensitive ways that influence their perceptions of how a family is involved or would like to be involved. Thus, the educators assumed the families had no concept of what the purpose of meetings were to be nor were they

willing to educate themselves on the meetings and proceedings. "…So once I explained we could give this a shot [IEP meeting], this is something were you get your voice, and [the child] gets a voice, and some were kind of reluctant. They said, 'Well, you know, okay, just to help out" (pg. 9).

**Unsympathetic to strife.** Partnering with professionals misunderstanding of families and their attitudes towards special education is the lack of insight educators have to the daily struggles and lifelong struggles that families must deal with every single day in order to maintain harmony and health in their family's unit. Dennis and Giangreco (1996) reflected on cultural implications during the family interviewing processes and recorded a professional explaining their understanding of CLD families and what they perceive the family's struggles to be. "For many people that I know, saying you are of African descent is more political and philosophical than it is racial" (p. 107).

While there is a point made that race is not superficial, assuming that families and individuals who talk about their race are making a political statement is degrading and can cause pain on the families who do identify as CLD and are proud of their heritage. It is also denying the right that families have to voice their opinion of the struggles their racial and ethnic background has historically faced.

Trainor (2005) documented self-determination perceptions and behaviors of diverse students during the transition process and it was similarly found in the article that educators continue to lack sympathy to the strife their families and students face. One specific interaction was important to document between a grandmother, her grandson, and the teacher:

Grandmother: "He doesn't do anything." (She begins to cry.)

Educator: “All this can be easily cleared up if Forest would just do what he has to do” (p. 239)

This is a blatant display of educators hearing what families say, but not listening to discover why they may be saying it and drawing a conclusion to the discussion are insensitive to the family’s emotional struggles. Trainor (2005) documented a similar interaction between educators and families and reported:

Teacher: Well, the thing is, being on probation is not real life. We can put you on all these contracts for attendance and so on, but you have to make the choices…

Student: I am making bad decisions, but I don’t know why. (p. 242)

Again, the professional lacked empathy for what the family and the student might be going through which resulted in the educator not addressing pressing issues in an appropriate and helpful way.

**Continuation of goal development that does not match family’s desires**. Quite possibly the most severely troubling pattern found in educator’s not trusting the family is their continuation of goal development despite the history of their goals not meeting the goals the family would like to set. Whether it is from lack of communication, misunderstandings, or general apprehension to become culturally sensitive, it was apparent in the studies reviewed that educators prioritized their goals higher than the goals the family might want to conceive for their children. As one educator stated clearly,

There’s our goals for them and then there’s their goals for themselves and there’s not a whole lot of intersection between the two often. Because what we want is for them to

> learn job skills and take the jobs we know they're able to do, attain some degree of independence. (Hogansen et al. 2008, p. 221)

Dennis and Giangreco (1996) further stated that professionals tend to base their opinions on higher standards than what a family might hold as their opinion for their child as revealed by their assessment: "…All too often, professionals assume because of their expertise, they have the solutions to a problem and do not consult families for their opinion or knowledge" (p. 108). Lastly, Geenen et al. (2005) documented a powerful quote made by a parent who was extremely displeased with how their child's educators continued to disregard her desires for what her child was learning in school.

> I think racism in middle school and high school is really the biggest thing…and it's too bad because as long as we've argued with these people and talked about curriculum, and talked about being available to the whole population they serve, they continue to teach really ignorant things, and you can only take so much of that garbage before you end up being enraged or just give up and walk away. (p. 11)

## Discussion

A meta-synthesis methodology was employed in this review to enable readers and future researchers and educators alike to examine how barriers embedded in the culture of special education are expressed and how they may lead to the misunderstanding of family determination and how it is developed at home. The methodology allowed for closer inspection of geographical location, participant characteristics, and comparisons between group perceptions that would not have been achieved through traditional article development by individual researchers. It is believed that the barriers uncovered through this methodology would not have been discovered using case-by-case literature reviews.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the results of this investigation. First, barriers identified are expressed on both the sides of families and educators. For example, both educators and families held and employed terms differently from one another, the professionals lacked trust of the families just as wholeheartedly that the families did not trust the educators, and both sides felt justified in the withholding of social capital that might have been imperative for the other side to know. Second, it can be assumed that withholding of social capital is a result of the two other barriers discussed. Miscommunications, or lack of communication, between professionals and families creates misinterpretations of terms and mistrust of others. From this, it can be justified to ask: Why should I provide others with sensitive information? Third, the family and their perspective should be held as more important than the educators. Educators are trained to employ the best practices for their students. However, the best practice theories do not address cultural values that are not mainstream society's values. If educators continue to employ best practice, whether acknowledging the negative impact they have on families or not, they will find that the said practices really are not best. The best practices are the ones that come from

collaboration with the families and their desires, wishes, and expectations so all sides can come to a mutual understanding of what needs to be accomplished for the greater good of the student, even if that means the educator must relinquish their westernized values in order to uphold the family's values. Fourth, the barriers identified and discussed pose as barriers to the development of the family's determination. As stated before, when parents are involved in the student's IEP/ITP processes and meetings, the student will be more likely to succeed in class, develop prosocial behaviors, and identify with the goals set for them with the guidance of their family and educators collaborating. This is a factor of their family unit adopting determined behaviors first and families will continue to develop their own determination with or without professionals understanding how to identify and foster it. It is a matter of professionals being open minded and valuing each family that governs how families will develop and use their determination skills. If families and schools are able to collaborate, the families will feel valued, trusted, and supported as makers of important decisions, a quality imperative to determination. The barriers stand in the way of developing relationships with families and with families working together with educators, which is why it was crucial to study and document the barriers of special education culture.

**Implications for Future Practice of Determination Training**

Revisiting the amendments made to IDEA (2004), parents and their participation have continuously been documented as crucial for the determination development of students. More specifically, when schools and parents are able to collaborate effectively, students learning outcomes improve, which directly influences the children's attitudes towards school, their social skills and behaviors, and the likelihood that they will take more challenging classes and pass them (USDOE 2007). The findings of this synthesis bring to light the challenges that families, parents, students, and educators continue to encounter within special education, and such

challenges have developed into barriers that are present in the dominant culture of special education. If we continue down this path, despite The United States become more diverse year after year and eventually leading to the majority of students being CLD, we will be setting up a considerable percentage of our future leaders to fail. In order for professionals to ensure that CLD students and their families are served as appropriately, respectfully, and continually as possible, we must reconsider the self-determination characteristics previously mentioned in this synthesis as fluid structures that can be modified for every student and every family.

1. Choice decision and goal attainment must be sourced from the family on every level. Educators should allow themselves to be available to support the decisions the family makes, but cannot be the sole providers and developers of goals.
2. Families must decide how and when their child becomes self-aware and knowledgeable of their rights and meanings of their disability. If the family does not wish for the child to understand their disability; that is not something an educator should interfere with.
3. Families should be encouraged to participate and receive all resources available in order to foster their participation, and this must continue even if little to no communication is given back to the professionals.
4. Just as families decide how and when their child becomes knowledgeable of their disability, the families decide how the child will express their strengths and weaknesses. Professionals may offer insight into what they see during the day but must spend equal time finding the small successes as they do the larger challenges.
5. Once families and students are made aware of the available resources for them to utilize, it is up to them to accept the accommodations and modifications. If they

choose not to accept them for the time being, the resources must continue to be made available for them to accept at any time, and they must be made aware of any new accommodations and modifications that can be of assistance.

6. Physical and emotional separation from the parents will only occur from the family's decision. This is not a decision to be made by the educators. Regardless of the decision to separate the child from the family and/or parents, professionals must support the decision being made and accommodate their expectations and goals to align with the new familial goal.
7. Goal directed behavior can be exhibited in ways that do not necessarily result in the child or family meeting a goal set forth by the professionals. Educators must be able to identify goal directed behavior as behavior that can be independent and autonomous, but it may also be inter-dependency on other family members and even rebutting statements and goals that the professionals make. It is critical to not consider this defiance or maladaptive behavior, but behavior that is culturally bound and implies as miscommunication and need for further discussion in order to create new goals the family and student may identify with more strongly.
8. In order for the child to believe that they are capable and know how to obtain what they desire, the family must first be able to do so. Therefore, educators must continually foster positive, encouraging relationships with all IEP/ITP members and other family members active in the child's life in order to understand their interpretation and implementation of capable behavior.

## Limitations

The direct quotes selected for this synthesis were subject to personal interpretation of the author. Similar researchers may have interpreted the thoughts, ideas, and notes made by the participants in the studies differently. An inter-observer agreement (IOA) is recommended for future research of syntheses regarding the same nature of topics that were discussed in this report. This would allow for better understanding of the data collected and would ensure that the interpretation of the data would increase in generalizability. The studies selected did not represent all regions of the United States equally, nor were all racial and ethnic backgrounds represented equally. The thirteen articles selected provided a variety of perspectives for inspection, but the results may have been supported more thoroughly if more articles had been selected and analyzed by multiple researchers to ensure quality of interpretation and universal understandings of how the selected quotes represent the barriers. As with all meta-syntheses, the limitations of this study include all original limitations of the studies selected, as the synthesis is only as strong as the included studies.

## Implications for Future Practice

On a positive note, there are several ways professionals can identify, address, and counteract the barriers they may encounter. Overall, it was found that the barriers are more likely to be torn down or rendered insignificant if educators are able to identify what is happening, but educators struggled in this area. School based training on cultural sensitivity is highly recommended for professionals. Culture is not all encompassing, and it is not a stagnant feature of a family or race. If educators are to acknowledge and act sensitively to this understanding, culturally sensitivity will be easily established in the school's practices. It is also equally important for educators to become knowledgeable of self-determination and family

determination. It is recommended that within transition services that educators allow families to define what it means to be determined for them. If professionals allow the fluidity of definitions to occur, the families will not feel as if they have been placed in a box with no way out.

Recommendations of future practices for families have also been found. Recognition of the westernized culture that they live in will serve them well for future meetings, discussions, and interactions with school personnel. By no means should a family aim to adopt values and future outcomes for their children that do not sit well with their culture. However, recruiting a family advocate from the greater community who represents their culture but also has obtained more knowledge of the dominant culture would be extremely helpful during meetings. This advocate would be able to communicate the family's desires in more specific ways, maintain harmony within the group, and support the determination development of the family by supporting their rights, values, and traditions in the meeting. The family advocate is capable of creating a bridge between opposing sides of an IEP/ITP meeting, and inviting an individual as an advocate should not only be understood by the family, but should be supported and encouraged by professionals.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This meta-synthesis focused on the barriers in special education culture that influenced the development of family determination. Based on the results, future research is needed in several l areas. First, this synthesis focused broadly on geographical locations and encompassed a variety of racial and ethnic background of participants. Future research in this area of study should be focused on one race or one region of the United States in order to support the statements made in this synthesis or to document new existing barriers. Second, research is needed to uncover more potential barriers in special education. This synthesis is not all-

encompassing in its application, and more barriers may exist that were not documented. Third, the culture of special education requires further investigation. A plethora of research has documented the culture and climate of schools and the impact they have on student success, professional success, and involvement in the greater community. Additional research is needed for the culture and climate of special education; more specifically, how the greater culture of the school district influences the climate of special education in the same district. It is possible the barriers discussed in this synthesis are formed in higher levels of administration, which is something that needs further consideration.

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Table 1

*Selected Article Characteristics*

| **Author/Year** | **Participants** | **Geographical Location** | **Data Sources** | **Research Focus** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ankeny et al. (2009) | 4 mothers | None Available | Interviews | Mother's Perspective |
| Banks (2013) | 3 Students | Historically Black University | Focus Groups | Barriers to Post-Sec. Education |
| Blue-Banning et al. (2002) | 38 Parents | TX, CA, KA, CT | Focus Groups | Parent Perceptions |
| Dennis and Giangreco (1996) | 14 Professionals | None Available | Phone Interviews | Perceptions of COACH protocol |
| Geenen et al. (2005) | 31 parents, 10 professionals | Northwest urban school district | 22 focus groups, 9 interviews | Barriers and strategies for CLD inolv. |
| Hogensen et al. (2008) | 67 students, 34 parents, 45 professionals | Two western U.S. high schools and university | Focus groups, interviews | Percept. of parents, students, prof. |
| Kim et al. (2007) | 10 parents | MD, CA | Phone interviews | Parents' perceptions |
| Martinez et al. (2012) | 136 parents | North Virginia | Surveys | Parents' perceptions |
| McHatton (2006) | 57 students | Large metro. University | Surveys | Students' perceptions |
| Rueda (2005) | 16 mothers | Los Angles | Focus groups | Mothers' perceptions |
| Shogren (2012) | 7 mothers | Southwest | Interviews | Mothers' perceptions |

Table 1 Cont.

| Author/Year | Participants | Geographical Location | Data Sources | Research Focus |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trainor (2005) | 15 students | Southwest metro. School dist. | Observations, focus groups, interviews | Students' and researcher's Perspectives |
| Trainor (2007) | 2 professionals | Midwest – Chestnutville And Del Centro | Focus groups, interviews | Professionals' perspectives |